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ABSTRACT

A model of persuasion suggests that individuals comply with a prediction of their behavior because they are persuaded by that prediction: a model of threat suggests that they defy prediction because of its threat of control. College students with either internal (N=20) or external (N=20) loci of control were informed of the accuracy of the experimenter's purported prediction of their previous choices between pairs of inkblot cards. Predictions were either personal (based on personality tests) or impersonal (based on group norms). A control group of ten internals and ten externals was not informed of the predictions. All subjects then rated each card one at a time. The measure of compliance or defiance consisted of the mean ratings of the predicted cards minus the mean ratings of the unpredicted cards. Results revealed a significant two-way interaction of locus of control and locus of prediction. Externals complied with impersonal predictions and defied personal predictions: internals complied with personal predictions and defied impersonal prediction. (NRB)

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Prediction as Persuasion and Threat: Interaction of Locus of Control and Locus of Prediction on Compliance and Reactance

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Prediction as Persuasion and Threat:
Interaction of Locus of Control and Locus of Prediction on Compliance and Reactance

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Atlanta, March 1981

Do people comply with a prediction of their behavior because they are persuaded by it, or do they defy it, because of "psychological reactance" (Brehm, 1966) to its threat of control? Which of these models, persuasion or threat, applies to predictions of our behavior? Does it depend on characteristics of the prediction such as its accuracy, or its being personal or impersonal; or on characteristics of the predictee, such as locus of control (Rotter, 1966)? Is there an interaction of these variables in determining whether the person responds to the prediction with compliance or defiance? What are the implications of viewing predictions as either persuasive or threatening? These are some of the questions I try to answer in this paper.

If a prediction is persuasive, it should be similar in its antecedents and consequences to other persuasive communications. For example, Sherman (1973) found that only external locus of control subjects comply with impersonal persuasion, which is aimed at everyone, whereas only internals comply with personal persuasion, which is aimed only at specific individuals. For what I am calling personal persuasion, Sherman used counter-attitudinal essays in forced compliance paradigm, and found that internals took responsibility for this personal self-persuasive message, which persuaded them either through a process of cognitive dissonance reduction (Festinger, 1957) or through self-

perception (Bem, 1967). Therefore, if predictions are persuasive, only externals should comply with impersonal predictions, which are aimed at everyone, whereas only internals should comply with personal predictions which are aimed at specific individuals (including, but not limited to, the self). (See tables)

Now, if predictions are threatening, they should have similar antecedents and consequences as other threats. For example, Cherulnik and Citrin (1974), using their interpretation of locus of control and reactance theory, hypothesized and found that only externals showed reactance to impersonal threats, which are aimed at everyone, whereas only internals showed reactance to personal threats, which are aimed at specific individuals. They claimed this was because one shows reactance only to threats which concern that over which one believes one generally has control. Although this interpretation of reactance theory and locus of control is debatable, and despite the possibility that Cherulnik and Citrin's (1974) results may have been due to pretest differences in their groups, we shall use their findings as a model of threat. Therefore, if predictions are threatening, only externals should defy impersonal predictions, which are aimed at everyone, whereas only internals should defy personal predictions, which are aimed only at specific individuals. (See tables)

Which of these models, persuasion or threat, applies to predictions? Because these models offer opposing hypotheses in terms of the interaction of locus of control and locus of prediction (i.e., personal-impersonal) on compliance or defiance to predictions, we must determine under what conditions each model is applicable or at least which produces the dominant net effect.

One variable which might distinguish between these two models is the accuracy of the prediction. Rozen (1970) found that people comply with incorrect predictions because they are persuaded by them, whereas people defy

correct predictions because they are threatened by them. Therefore, Sherman's (1973) findings with persuasion may apply only to incorrect predictions, whereas Cherulnik and Citrin's findings with threat may apply only to correct predictions. This is consistent with the fact that Sherman used only counter-attitudinal persuasive messages, which are analogous to incorrect predictions. whereas Cherulnik and Citrin threatened only a proattitudinal choice, which is analagous to a correct prediction.

Therefore, a three-way interaction of locus of control, locus of prediction, and accuracy of prediction was hypothesized such that incorrect predictions should produce the compliance only of externals to impersonal predictions and the compliance only of internals to personal predictions, whereas correct predictions should produce the defiance only of externals of impersonal predictions and the defiance only of internals of personal predictions. (See tables)

In order to test these hypotheses, twenty internal and twenty external college students, after indicating preferences within five pairs of inkblot cards, were informed of purported predictions of their choices, which were either correct or incorrect, and either personal (i.e., based on personality tests) or impersonal (i.e., based on group norms). In a control group, ten internals and ten externals indicated preferences but were not told of any predictions. Then all subjects rated the cards one at a time. The measure of compliance or defiance was the mean ratings of the predicted cards minus the mean ratings of the unpredicted cards. (See tables)

An analysis of variance revealed only a two-way interaction ($p < .01$) of locus of control and locus of prediction, rather than a three-way interaction, and no main effects. After collapsing over the Accuracy of Prediction variable, planned comparisons supported the following conclusions: only externals comply with impersonal predictions and defy personal predictions,

whereas only internals comply with personal predictions and defy impersonal predictions. (See tables) The correlation between locus of control and the ratings was significantly positive ($r = .61$, $p < .05$) for the impersonal predictions, and it was significantly negative ($\underline{r} = -.57$, $p < .05$) for the personal predictions.

Although these results are inconsistent with those of Cherulnik and Citrin, the theoretical and methodological weaknesses of their study have already been mentioned, and the results seem more consistent with the concepts of internality and externality. One may be more threatened by events usually <u>not</u> under his/her control.

Further research is now underway to generalize these findings to the effects of self-prediction (Sherman, 1980) and to the effects of personality assessment feedback. These results may be applied to attitude and behavior change produced by predictions and feedback in settings such as experiments, psychotherapy, public polling, advertising, and education.

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Introduction

Persuasion (Sherman, 1973)

	Personal	Impersonal
Internal	Compliance	
External		Compliance

Threat (Cherulnik & Citrin, 1974)

	Personal	Impersonal
Internal	Defiance	
External		Defiance

Method

Prediction

Incorrect (Rozen, 1970) Correct

	Personal	Impersonal	Personal	Impersonal
Internal	Compliance		Defiance	
External		Compliance		Defiance

Results

Prediction

	Incorrect		Correct	
	Personal	Impersonal	Personal	Impersonal
Internal	-0.12	-1.02	+1.11	-0.38
External	+0.06	+2.76	-1.07	+1.58

Conclusions

	Personal	Impersonal
Internal	Compliance	Defiance
External	Defiance	Compliance